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THOUGHTS ON THE FIRST YEAR OF THE
URBAN STUDIES PROGRAM AT RUTGERS,
THE STATE UNIVERSITY OF NEW JERSEY

Having been exposed to a fairly broad cross-section of the current literature on Metropolis and Urban Affairs proposals for America, I think we (Rutgers Urban Fellows) are in a good position to react to the question of How can the program be effectively improved?

However, before presenting my few suggestions for exploration, I should like to comment upon the way this year has progressed.

In my opinion, one of the important positive aspects of this first year has been the planned freedom and flexibility for the Fellows. Growth of the individual is always nurtured best by that kind of a permissive atmosphere which guides without directing. I think the staff from John Bebout on down should ponder on this subtle and elusive goal which they achieved with such natural spontaneity. I further believe this difficult goal could not have been achieved unless it were the end product of natural and spontaneous administrators and professors.

So whatever else you plan for future years, please don't sacrifice this golden ingredient of academic freedom for each Fellow.

One of the end results of this basic exploratory philosophy has been a recognition, on my part at least, that there is just so damned much to be covered in this massive new field that no one person

can begin to plumb the depths even of his own small segment of interest. I think that your general approach of permitting us to attempt to fill the chinks in our intellectual armor has proven to be another positive aspect of the total program. In fact, there appears to have been some prescience in John Bebout's first year philosophy. Congrats to you all!

Also, I am sure that the staff agrees that the Land Grant Lectures idea might profitably be extended into all day seminars or conferences for a maximum of 50 to 75 persons each session, who would be interested in increasing their Urban Affairs knowledge while learning more about the function and goals of the Rutgers Urban Studies Center.

Some Suggestions for Future Years

1. No matter what new ideas may be introduced, don't consider giving up the nine months' program. For several reasons, I would even be inclined to vote for an extension and enlargement of it to include ten persons by the third year, after the Urban Studies Center curriculum has grown to satisfy the needs of a greater number of applicants with more diversified backgrounds.

2. It might be a salutary and productive idea to add a Negro to the staff of the Urban Studies Center.

A. More and more, the problems of race and ethnicity are going to bear upon the future of the city as a politico-economic-social entity.

B. Rutgers could profit, I believe, in its Urban Studies Program development if it made this move sooner rather than later.

6. Short of this, I think a white who has worked closely with race relations ought to be at least a consultant to the staff. (Naturally I'm suggesting me).

3. There is no question in my mind that opportunity should be afforded for say 10 to 15 students per year to matriculate for only one or two classes per semester.

A. These "scholarship students" should be sponsored by the labor union or industry in which they work. Doubtless they would sit in those courses which they most need for a fill-in education to better equip them as potential urban-affairs-oriented-citizen-counsellors.

4. The Urban Studies Center should initiate conferences with the State Civil Service Commission for standardising some temporary criteria for Urban Agents to work as advisors to Mayors or Metropolitan regional bodies.

5. Those of us who have been here this year should be granted some kind of certification so that future students may have one more tangible motivation for their studies here. I believe that the value to the Center would outweigh any possible harmful consequences which might result from prematurely dubbing us as Urban Trainees or Urban Extension Fellows, or whatever. The main idea of this would be to start creating a sensitivity on the part of city and town administrators that they have to begin to think in new social and civic terms of Metropolitan Region as opposed to city self-interests.

6. Possibly one or two Urban Studies Fellows with a nagging desire to get M.A. accreditation for their year here should be permitted to take two or three courses per semester toward the M.A.

degree in Metropolitan Sociology. With a modicum of planning now, preparations could be made to give such graduates credit for the special Urban Studies Center oriented courses now being taught by Professors Gutman and Popence. I would also suggest that Professors Toby and Brodemeier could modify one of their courses sufficiently so that it could qualify as a possible seminar for those applicants with higher academic horizons.

7. I see no reason why money should not be made available for a second year Fellowship for those two or three Fellows who want to finish up the M.A. Degree. This sociology degree program would at least have the merit of giving the staff an opportunity to experiment with two or three students in an area which to me seems crucial to the future of your program here at Rutgers and in the nation as a whole.

In conclusion, I strongly feel that the staff of this Center can and probably should indulge in bold planning. I know that these thoughts may sound premature. I can recognize the brash quality of some of them, but I do believe they are more realistic than visionary.

For instance, I am quite sure that at least one or two of Dr. Gutman's graduate students in Metropolitan Sociology would like to concentrate in this general area. Possibly one or two of them could spend some time next year in preparing for Urban Agency with this Center by working more closely with staff.

In the next twenty years, no one person will be totally equipped for this gargantuan task of Urban Advisor, so can we accept that fact and realize that the Urban Studies Center has far more to

gain than to lose by getting more conceptual and imaginative.

Rutgers may not have the staff or the funding of the Joint Center at Harvard - M.I.T., but there is no rule in the books which says it can't have a more prolific and productive originality and insight.

Although this year at Rutgers has, among many other things, given me a profound respect for the importance of sound research as the precursor to action for social change, it has also shown me that a conservative's need for hard facts can often eventuate in soft facts and a halting of exploration or empirically based experimentation. It is even conceivable that statistics on people's attitudes and values concerning Metropolis can be utilized by reactionary planners to thwart the progress they may fear. So the question could become: When is status quo thinking as reflected in statistical analysis a justifiable roadblock to action for change?

Because sufficient research to give us total academic security in facts will not be forthcoming in the foreseeable future, I believe that exploration through trial and error will be the only substitute for hard fast research in the field of the city which is changing far too rapidly to be researched with any degree of validity or reliability.

These are a few ideas, most of which I am sure the staff has already considered. In this vast uncharted area of the future of our cities, perhaps no provocative speculation should be considered spurious and certainly no revolutionary thought can afford to be called radical.

With the excellence of your staff and faculty at the Urban Studies Center, you are already in a fine position to compete with and

outdistance the accepted masters at the longer established institutions. And although funders must of necessity be traditionally conservative, they too are going to start thinking more radically as today's research becomes obsolete before tomorrow begins.

I guess what I'm really saying is that research on the city is never going to catch up with the pace of mid-twentieth century change. So possibly we can dispense with it temporarily and free our minds as well as our time schedules for the more important task of spontaneous, original and creative thinking which matches the accelerating demise and rebirth of the Regions about which we are concerned. Naturally, if we are to have this kind of imaginative creativity at the local and regional level, it has to begin in the Centers for Urban Affairs which are preparing the workers for the future responsibilities of urban survival.

In conclusion, I should like to suggest that the proposal for the Urban Studies Center's Human Renewal Program for a New Jersey Neighborhood has the distinct advantage of combining action-oriented research with a creative community approach to the biggest problem facing the American city today: How can we help the human side of urban renewal keep pace with the physical and economic advancements?

If the Rutgers Urban Studies Center can help to solve this most knotty problem, it will be making the greatest possible contribution to the future of New Jersey and the survival of urban civilization in America.